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THE PASTORAL DRAMA IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

The audience for whom the pastoral plays of the eighteenth century were written was not the audience for whom Tasso's "Aminta," Guarini's "Pastor Fido," or, for that matter, Fletcher's "Faithful Shepherdess," were written. The majority of the plays seem to have been composed largely for the delight of orange-wenchers rather than for the delight of a beauty-loving and cultivated society. The spawn of minor dramatists, their authors were not Tassos, Guarinis, or Fletchers, but men whose names are now forgotten.

Following in the steps of greater dramas, but without their poetic qualities, these plays were produced primarily to please. Their preferment of operatic form shows how much they were subject to that *arbiter populi*, Fad; at least one-third of the entire number of dramatic pastorals which appeared after the beginning of the eighteenth century were operas. Quite different from the quality of this popularity was another cause for the favor they found either as serious or as burlesque literature. The pastoral, circumscribed by certain rules and regulations, appealed to the period's love of regularity. The hue and cry of the Restoration was *imitation of nature*, an assumed simplicity which has been aptly termed "wax-work literalness" in the making of poem or play. In the pastoral there was a superficial expression of the same theory, which led Dryden to centre his "All for Love" in the palace at Alexandria and to cut out the spaces of the Mediterranean.

It was characteristic also, especially of the early part of this period, to work over other men's plays; it was an age of redacteurs rather than of original authors, such as the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries had been. Pastoral plays offered an excellent page for mediocrity to re-write, a page which contained no real perplexities of plot or character delineation. It does not seem to have occurred to the English mind that its "bastard imitations" could be anything but an improvement upon the original. There is no begging the fact that the point of

view of the ordinary English adapter was a conceited one; even the best of French plays into which he introduced indecencies and incongruities, he was convinced the English version had much bettered. It is necessary to read only the preface to Motteux's translations (?) to see how vastly satisfied he was with his own performance. A certain reverence, however, was retained for Tasso and Guarini, so that the translations of the "Aminta" and the "Pastor Fido" have been less despoiled of their beauty than other more inconspicuous pastorals.

During this period the pastoral was intellectually a subject of some moment, and it is baffling to find the drama at its lowest ebb. There remains, to testify to an intellectual interest in the pastoral literary mode, a great profusion of eclogues. From the *early* seventeenth to the *late* seventeenth century it was, as it were, from heart to head, and the interest in pastoral literature shifted from the romance of romance and play to the scholastic exercise of writing eclogues. So far as I know, not one pastoral romance was written in England during the eighteenth century. The purposes of the eclogue had always been largely intellectual or moral rather than æsthetic; this intellectual trend is evident among our own English poets, in the didactic and religious poetry of Barclay and Googe, in the satirical and allegorical poems of Spenser, Milton, and Gay. Not only had the best interest shifted from one pastoral fashion to another, but the play, as it existed, was losing its redeeming features. Both allegory and symbolism, expressive of a certain spiritual fineness, adorned and heightened the lyric beauty of the "Aminta" or the "Faithful Shepherdess," attributes of the æsthetic which perish altogether in the coarse burlesques and vapid sentimentalities of the eighteenth century, when the aim of pastoral plays became not so much an impulse to produce something artistic as to cater to the coarse elements of vulgar audiences.

The degeneration, which is so evident, even from a brief reading of late seventeenth and of eighteenth century plays, must be accounted for in two ways: a weakness within the pastoral, that is an innate weakness, and an external influence which, had the plays remained the same, would have prevented their popularity; in short, the only condition upon which they could remain popu-

lar was that they should degenerate. Peter Motteux marks the full perception of this condition and a conscious passing from the old tradition to the new. "The Thracian Wonder," "Bellamira," "The Royal Shepherdess," "Calisto," "Thyrsis," all have admirable elements and no *premeditated effort* to truckle with low comedy features; but from the time of the appearance of the "Temple of Love" (1706), coarse buffoonery and low comedy devices are conspicuous.

It is difficult to make any adequate classification of pastoral plays, so invariably do they contain anastomosing elements. I have, however, attempted a division into (1) classical pastorals, (2) court and heroic pastorals, and (3) domestic pastorals. To define a class by a specimen, I think it may be said that the "Aminta," the "Faithful Shepherdess," and the "Gentle Shepherd" belong to the first class, retaining, as they consciously do, the simplicity and innocence of the pastoral; to the second class belong the "Pastor Fido," any one of Lyly's plays containing pastoral elements, a number of late seventeenth century plays, among them "Bellamira" and the "Royal Shepherdess," all distinguished by their court elements, their heroic elements — a certain display of clothes, birth and great deeds. The third class is entirely a creature of the eighteenth century, called domestic because it depended upon the conditions of the day and travestied former pastoralism. An occasional return to the classical tradition marks the period under consideration, the return being, however, more often to mock than to emulate, for the domesticated pastoral with its low comedy jingles and jokes was then in high favor. Despite a "Semele" or a "Judgment of Paris," mythological elements are increasingly left out. Plays containing court and heroic features were most popular during the Restoration. The heroic lent itself admirably to the spectacular, and for that the audience was agog; that the heroic play so far ignored the actual individual that it could not be essentially dramatic, did not at all trouble the audience. Such plays as "Bellamira" were a serious effort to combine the pastoral and the great events of kingdoms and wars, and very ludicrous and incongruous indeed were those efforts. The court element remained about evenly popular, appearing for example again and

again in "Dione," "Love in a Riddle," "Teraminta," and "Cymon."

It is not particularly pleasant to study a phase of literature which, once fresh and undoubtedly attractive, has become old and *roué*; to find most prominent, instead of a certain superficial innocence and poetic beauty, ugly conditions of the day, marriage made a laughing stock, courtesans an open amusement, and all masquerading *à la pastorale*. There was always a paucity of themes in pastoral literature, the very nature of which made impossible the use of much material from the national life. The one legitimate comedy theme that belonged to it was that of love, a theme which made the pastoral vastly popular. While this subject was treated more or less purely, it seemed after all the most appropriate peg on which to hang other incidentals of the "mode." Love, as well as nature, was typified and not individualized, and in every case was based largely upon impulse. Spiritual conceptions of love are never present in dramatic pastorals except in an *in memoriam* fashion or as an allegory.

If the character of the conception of the relation between man and woman had been higher in the first place, the play later on would not have been so easily seduced as it was. The old love-theme where not seriously portrayed was more often burlesqued than satirized, for the dramatic pastoral was too depleted to use satire. Satire is something finer, more intellectual, on a higher plane than burlesque. Burlesque has almost always a certain muscular element common to humor; it leans upon the grotesque for its strength and contains elements of grossness; it has lost both the concealed sarcasm and the reserves of satire.

The use of plot in the pastoral was as inelastic as its perception of its own possibilities as comedy was false. Its devices were worn threadbare with repetition. The inconstant lover, the untrue friend, the lovers' merry-go-round in which everybody loves somebody who does not love him, concealed identity through disguise or ignorance, discovery of gentle birth, supernatural betrothal, and the assault of deity or nobility upon innocence and insignificance, were used again and again. Types of character, too, were repeated. Character in a certain sense interlaces with the plot device, as the pastoral play had scarcely

more for a plot than a character type or a series of character types. The heartfree, invincible shepherd who is conquered, the lustful shepherdess, the good old shepherd, the faithful shepherd, the chaste shepherdess, the priest, the satyr, the stern father, the lustful royal lover, Deity, are all types at once recognizable. The shepherdess disguised as a man became popular after the Restoration. The localities where these plays were laid suffered a general change during this period. Sicily and Arcadia do not predominate; the habitat, the setting may be anywhere: Cuba, Greece, England, Scotland, Italian groves, India, Sidon, and only rarely in Arcadia or Sicily.

The entire absence of cause and effect in pastoral drama reveals the fact that it was very necessary for it to take refuge in some type device, some conventional champfering. For the pastoral shows no insight into human nature; it invariably substitutes superficial, mechanical confusions for the vital entanglements and difficulties of real life. It was, therefore, peculiarly unadapted for tragedy and except for an occasional throe does not seem to have aspired after tragedy — in fact it seems to have been serenely unconscious of it. Tragedy must find its counterpart in real life to be either vital or interesting; if such be the truth, then Gay's "Dione" is a mistaken attempt, without altering the nature to prove the capacity of pastoral drama larger than it really is.

If pleasure is the aim of comedy, then the coarse burlesques of this period are a revelation of that in which the people delighted; if correction is the aim of comedy, then these dramatic pastorals absolutely failed, pushed by compulsion from "Love in a Riddle" to "Damon and Phillida." As English comedy dealt increasingly with the actual it is small wonder that, despite its efforts, the dramatic pastoral became more and more unpopular. Pastoralists showed their recognition of the general trend of English comedy to use contemporary setting and events, but in their attempts to change the nature of that which could exist legitimately only in the realm of the ideal, they hastened its downfall. Singularly devoid of humor and of perception of its own possibilities, this species of drama became the more easily a laughing stock.

At the best, the pastoral was never a virile species of drama, for its stronghold lay in a sentimental conception of life. It had no innate moral purpose, and losing the æsthetic, as it had practically by the beginning of the eighteenth century, it lost all. It occasionally *assumed* a moral purpose, as, for instance, in the "Faithful Shepherdess," in Crowne's "Calisto," or in Cibber's "Love in a Riddle." But the moral tone appeared only to suffer a quick compulsion of silence, whether in the main plot or sub-plot. Often an author, as for example Cibber, would conscientiously locate all his indecencies in the sub-plot, which invariably "took" and sometimes managed to support the central story. These plays were not so much immoral as indecent, if one can make such a distinction; immorality does not always imply coarseness or grossness, two distinctive traits of the majority of pastoral plays appearing after 1660. Even where the pastoral boldly condemned a vice it dwelt so upon the details of the evil that it "expressed too much of the vice which it decried." Ward says that there are two forces which no dramatic literature can afford to neglect: national traditions and "the enduring principles of moral law and order."

At their best, pastoral plays had idealized love, tenaciously followed an æsthetic ideal, if not a moral one, and displayed a delicate, if conventional, appreciation of nature and a beauty of language whether in prose or verse. After the Restoration, they rapidly degenerated, they travestied love, their motive was sentimental or farcical, they ignored nature and used a cheap and tawdry language. The only condition upon which their trifling multiplicity existed was that they should perish quickly. The century was weary of them, and the farm play, perhaps nourished by the pastoral, was decidedly more to the taste of the public.

If the pastoral drama had not been marked for death, then the end of the century, with its new lyric beauty, its Burns, its visionary Blake, its "Lyrical Ballads," was the moment when it would have been revived, retouched with life, and not, as it was, cast aside, its poetic beauty utterly dissipated in metre, word and thought.

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